

GIFFORDS WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF DPH FUNDING FOR GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION, HB 6659

TO: APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

SUBMITTED BY: MIKE MCLIVELY, POLICY DIRECTOR, GIFFORDS CENTER FOR VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

DATE: FEBRUARY 27, 2023

SUBJECT MATTER: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF DPH FUNDING FOR GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION, HB 6659

Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Giffords is a national gun violence prevention organization named after former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords, who was shot in the head in 2011 while hosting an event for her constituents in Tucson, Arizona. At Giffords, we work with legislators and advocates around the country to promote common sense solutions to gun violence, and with our community violence work we recognize that the day-to-day shootings on our city streets that occur disproportionately in communities of color are one of the main drivers of America's gun violence epidemic.¹ This is true in Connecticut as well, where more than half of the state's gun homicide victims are Black, and where young Black men are more than *39 times more likely* to be murdered with a gun than young white men.²

Across the nation over the past few years, we've seen a spike in homicides and shootings since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic,³ including in Connecticut, where gun-related homicides have nearly doubled from 2018 levels. Last year, Hartford had its highest number of homicides in nearly two decades.⁴ This is an epidemic that is not just taking lives, but also costing Connecticut taxpayers tens of millions of dollars annually.⁵

¹ Giffords, Community Violence, <https://giffords.org/issues/community-violence>.

² The Economic Cost of Gun Violence in Connecticut, Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, <https://giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Economic-Cost-of-Gun-Violence-in-Connecticut.pdf>.

³ Researchers from the National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice found that across the country, "homicide rates increased 30% in 2020, a large and troubling increase that has no modern precedent." https://craftmediabucket.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/Year_End_Crime_Update_Design.pdf.

⁴ Hartford, New Haven see stark differences in 2022 homicide rates, <https://www.wtnh.com/news/hartford-new-haven-see-stark-differences-in-2022-homicide-rates>.

⁵ The Economic Cost of Gun Violence in Connecticut, Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, <https://giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Economic-Cost-of-Gun-Violence-in-Connecticut.pdf>.

There is a clear and urgent need to respond to community violence with every available resource and not just law enforcement approaches, but also community and public-health based solutions. That's why, while Giffords strongly supports the \$2.5 million included in the Governor's budget on Line T1449 for the Department of Public Health to fund gun violence intervention grants in FY2024, and the \$400,000 on Line 274 for operational expenses each year, **we urge you to increase the grant-related appropriation to \$10 million in each year of the fiscal 2024-25 budget to bring this funding in line with the scope of the violence epidemic in Connecticut.**⁶

Community violence intervention and prevention programs are highly individualized and targeted violence reduction strategies that recognize how relationships, social norms, and peer networks influence behavior.⁷ Public health-centered approaches like Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs, street outreach, cognitive behavioral therapy, and intensive peer mentoring use outreach, direct communication, and supportive relationships to engage those at greatest risk of gun violence, while providing transformational opportunities to high-risk young men.

In states like Massachusetts, *which has one of the lowest gun homicides rates in the nation*, large investments in such strategies are saving lives and taxpayer dollars: generating more than \$5.00 in savings for each dollar invested because of significant reductions in violence and crime recidivism rates.⁸

While the funding currently included in HB 6659 is a step in the right direction, we urge you to do more to save lives here in Connecticut. For context, Massachusetts is investing nearly \$40M million annually for the types of programs described above, which represents a per-homicide investment of more than \$260,000. Given the urgency of community violence, and the promising fiscal outlook in Connecticut—with a projected budget surplus of \$3.1 billion, and a proposal for \$500 million in tax breaks on the table for next year—⁹now is the time for an effort to truly meet the moment.

⁶ CT HB 6659, <https://legiscan.com/CT/bill/HB06659/2023>.

⁷ Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, Healing Communities in Crisis, <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/report/healing-communities-in-crisis-lifesaving-solutions-to-the-urban-gun-violence-epidemic>.

⁸ Commonwealth Corporation, SAFE AND SUCCESSFUL YOUTH INITIATIVE (SSYI), <https://commcorp.org/programs/safe-and-successful-youth-initiative>.

⁹ CT tax receipts surge as Lamont prepares new tax-cutting plan; <https://ctmirror.org/2023/01/17/ct-budget-surplus-lamont-tax-cuts>.

Other states around the country are taking significant action on this issue including in Illinois (\$250M),¹⁰ California (\$200M),¹¹ Wisconsin (\$45M),¹² Pennsylvania (\$30M),¹³ and New Jersey (\$10M). **We urge Connecticut leaders to build upon Governor Lamont's proposal and strengthen it by allocating more resources for community-based programs and ensuring there is dedicated staff in the Department of Public Health's Office of Injury Prevention to support this effort.**

Giffords works with state administrators around the country who implement state-level community violence reduction programs and is available to assist in any way, including sharing best practices and lessons learned from other states. Given the crisis of community violence, and the unique fiscal opportunity in Connecticut, the time to act is now.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mike McLively
Policy Director
Giffords Center for Violence Intervention

¹⁰ Illinois invests \$250 million in community violence prevention programs, <https://www.kfvs12.com/2021/12/10/illinois-invests-250-million-community-violence-prevention-programs>.

¹¹ May Budget Revise: Governor Newsom Delivers Largest Ever State Investment in Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention Efforts; <https://asmdc.org/press-releases/may-budget-revise-governor-newsom-delivers-largest-ever-state-investment-gun-violence>.

¹² Evers allocating \$45M in federal funds to violence prevention, crime victim programs, <https://www.wpr.org/evers-allocating-45m-federal-funds-violence-prevention-crime-victim-programs>.

¹³ Governor Wolf Announces \$23 Million in Second Round of Violence Intervention and Prevention Grant Program Awards, [https://www.governor.pa.gov/newsroom/governor-wolf-announces-23-million-in-second-round-of-violence-intervention-and-prevention-grant-program-awards/#:~:text=Governor%20Tom%20Wolf%20announced%20today,Crime%20and%20Delinquency%20\(PCCD\)](https://www.governor.pa.gov/newsroom/governor-wolf-announces-23-million-in-second-round-of-violence-intervention-and-prevention-grant-program-awards/#:~:text=Governor%20Tom%20Wolf%20announced%20today,Crime%20and%20Delinquency%20(PCCD)).